

## **STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE 20 JANUARY 2021**

### **CODE OF CONDUCT – COMPLAINTS UPDATE**

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#### **Recommendation**

- 1. The Assistant Director for Legal and Governance recommends that:**
  - (a) the formal complaints that have been made about the conduct of County Councillors and their outcome be noted; and**
  - (b) the Committee considers what, if any, further action should be taken to ensure members are aware of and comply with their obligations under the Code of Conduct.**

#### **Summary**

2. This report is to update the Committee on formal complaints about the conduct of councillors which have been dealt with since the last report in October 2020. The Committee has delegated to the Monitoring Officer the responsibility of filtering complaints received, in consultation with the Chairman and/or Independent Person as may be appropriate, and so the MO then reports to the Committee on the decisions taken.

#### **Background**

3. The Council receives a relatively small number of formal complaints concerning the conduct of county councillors. None of these have recently progressed to formal investigation but have been resolved one way or the other through the facilitation of the Monitoring Officer or no further action where appropriate. There were 4 formal complaints in calendar year 2013, 3 in 2014, 2 in 2015, 2 in 2016, 1 in 2017 and 7 in 2019. There were 5 in 2020.

#### **Complaint 04/2020**

5. This complaint suggested that a councillor used inappropriate language in a letter to a newspaper in relation to a national issue which had been reported locally.

6. The complainant also complained to the District Council as the member concerned was a Councillor for both authorities and I liaised with the Monitoring Officer of the District Council about the response.

7. The conclusion was that no action should be taken. There was no evidence that the Councillor had breached the Code of Conduct. Whilst they had expressed strong opinions they were entitled to do so. As the letter was signed by the Councillor using their title, they were reminded about being clear when expressing their own opinions to avoid perception that they were representing the authorities' views.

## **Complaint 05/2020**

8. This was a similar complaint in that a member of the public suggested that a Councillor had been quoted in the local paper using language that demonstrated a breach of the principles of public life, as set out in the Code of Conduct.

9. The precise allegation of breach was unclear but on review the language used was not considered to breach the Code of Conduct.

## **Elections 2021**

10. The County Council elections are due to be held on 6 May 2021 and we are preparing for these with our elections officer colleagues in the District Councils. The guidance on the pre-election period ('purdah') is also being updated as a reminder to current Councillors.

## **Contact Points**

### County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

### Specific Contact Points for this report

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## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.